

Local Area Planning 2003

WorkFirst will continue to evolve and improve through creative thinking applied to lessons we've learned.

April 2, 2002

RETHINKING THE WORKFIRST PARTNERSHIP

Approaching the fifth year of WorkFirst and TANF re-authorization, we are strengthening the program for participants, staff and administrators. We have a new system, CATS; new rules; new tools; high expectations; and shrinking resources.

Through it all WorkFirst remains a partnership although the role and expectations of the partnership are evolving. It has been critically important for DSHS and ESD to work more closely and collaboratively to ensure that process expectations and outcomes for caseload reduction and employment exits are met. As the two largest TANF administering agencies move to the center of performance, other partners take more supporting roles. In the future, performance rewards and consequences will be distributed proportionately with responsibilities. Agency staff will be directly rewarded for their exceptional contributions to WorkFirst success.

Local Area planning, no longer the center of WorkFirst performance expectations, continues to be a vehicle for innovation, communication, network building, resource sharing and development, experimenting, learning, and continuous quality improvement. LPAs will be key players in deciding what “block grant” services their community college will offer. We still plan to recognize the contributions of local partners by offering bonuses to LPAs for high performance in the composite index and for innovation.

CURRENT VALUE

1. *LOCAL INNOVATION BENEFITS WORKFIRST*

Most of the best practices we have today were initiated in the field as local partners and staff put their heads together to affect participant success and program outcomes. One of the best examples is the practice of case-staffing with all of the partners that provide services to a participant. Fast track job search; long-term client workshops; drivers license reinstatement; focused returner workshops; job fairs; client portfolios; and community forums all grew out of team-based quality improvements and partnership commitments.

2. *ORGANIZATIONS THAT SERVE WORKFIRST PARTICIPANTS RECEIVE THE SAME MESSAGE.*

A job; a better job; a better life—housing, education, domestic violence, transportation, and mental health service providers; DVR; LEP contractors; food banks; businesses; Community Action Councils; and faith-based organizations, locally, are all in WorkFirst together. One example is the partnership between the Everett and Snohomish County Housing Authorities and their LPA partners where client non-participation can result in loss of the housing subsidy.

3. *PARTNER COMMITMENTS REINFORCE WORKFIRST GOALS AND RESULTS.*

Workgroups that focus on specific components or issues such as marketing to local businesses, designing educational career ladders, joint case-staffing, or collaborating for participants with special needs bring a deeper focus and a diversity of solutions to WorkFirst.

The Clark-Skamanian partnership's recent focus on employment options for families with criminal histories led to the following results:

- Access to six-month fidelity bonding for participants with felony records through the Corrections Clearing House;
- Train the Trainers for LPA partners and cross-training of staff in the WorkFirst, WIA and criminal justice systems focused on how to employ the offender population;
- Practical answers to questions and tips for working with the offender population.

4. *FUNDING IS TIGHT: PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS LEVERAGE RESOURCES.*

- When contracts were eliminated, the Rainier CSOA changed vendor relationships into partner relationships by exploring new ways to work together. Now, Seattle City Light comes to the CSO every Friday to offer energy assistance. This saves AREN resources.
- The Housing Authority of Thurston County, Inter-City Transit, ESD, DSHS and WIA partnered on a grant to station vans at a housing site to give participants rides to work. The project also offers work experience and training to prepare participants to become bus drivers.
- The New Chance program at Olympic College Shelton receives federal funds for worker retraining. At the last graduation, a quarter of the graduates were TANF clients. Next quarter, 13 TANF participants will be enrolled.

5. *OVER TIME PARTNERSHIPS BECOME LEARNING COMMUNITIES--LEARNING FROM MISTAKES AND STACKING SUCCESSES ON TOP OF SUCCESSES.*

Some partnerships have blurred organizational lines when it comes to participant success. Everyone is in WorkFirst together. Several LPAs have used bonus awards to fund small projects. Port Townsend -East Jefferson LPA recently submitted a proposal for Empowered Connections, WorkFirst participation workshops, similar to the project they implemented with last year's award. This year the project is more intensive and more cost effective.

6. *LAP PARTNERSHIPS ADD VALUE TO BUSINESS OUTREACH*

Local Area Planning is a forum for discussion and resolution of issues and concerns around working with the business community when it comes to WorkFirst participants. Thurston County LPA has strengthened the Business Outreach relationship with WorkSource. They collaborate on job fairs, and employer appreciation events. The LPA has taken a career ladder approach to pre and post employment training to help participants get entry-level jobs and then progress to better jobs in the health care field. The partners also collaborated to produce a marketing tool that explains the benefits of hiring WorkFirst participants.

7. *LAP PARTNERSHIPS STRENGTHEN PET AND OTHER EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS*

The new block grant approach to employment focused training for WorkFirst participants empowers local partners to plan for a continuum of training options that will address community business needs and workforce gaps. Through this process, it should be possible achieve the best results by blending the resources available in the community and avoiding duplication of efforts.

8. *LAP PARTICIPATION IS AN IMPORTANT STRATEGY FOR WPLEX*

As WPLEX takes on the main responsibility for retention and wage progression, working with LPAs remains an important strategy. WPLEX staff currently participate in 20 LPAs.

9. *WORKSOURCE AND WORKFIRST INTEGRATION BEGINS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL*

WorkSource is an essential resource for job retention and wage progression for former WorkFirst participants. Pierce County LPA is officially a WIA sub group. The Local Area Plan is incorporated into the WIA plan. The appropriate parties in both systems have signed it.

NEW EXPECTATIONS

*** LPAs will be key players in deciding what “block grant” services their community college will offer.**

FOR LOCAL AREA PARTNERS

1. Meet as often as the group deems necessary to continuously support the WorkFirst mission, principles, and the Governor’s performance objectives. Aim the partnership toward objectives it can influence;
2. Create practical structures to direct, preserve, and enhance what is most valued in the partnership;
3. Update the LAP on the WorkFirst website at least annually by September 30th each year;
4. Maintain focus, accountability and direction through leadership rotation;
5. Enter into mutually beneficial partnership agreements that bring resources together for TANF clients.

FOR SUB 3

1. Resume site visits to local planning areas in August 2002;
2. Attend annual leadership planning meeting with local leaders in the fall of 2002;
3. Communicate decisions, plans, study results, and expectations local partnerships in a timely fashion through various media;
4. Continue to make awards to LPAs for their contributions to WorkFirst-- innovation, process improvement, planning and overall excellence (perhaps modeled on the Baldrige criteria).

FOR THE LOCAL AREA PLANNING COORDINATOR

1. Update Sub 3 quarterly on progress and request time on the agenda as needed;
2. Produce an annual state of the partnership report for the field and for Sub 3;
3. Coordinate site visits and the annual leadership meeting;
4. Participate on the WorkFirst training and communication workgroups and help to disseminate information on local successes;
5. Offer facilitation, mediation, planning assistance or contracted services that support strategic local partnerships for WorkFirst operations;
6. Promote models and formats for MOAs and other partnership working agreements;
7. Support LAP leads during transition and find ways to encourage, support and develop local leadership.